25t Brodrick--98 S-3 (1939) 1948 Laotians-1-2
116, 626, 683, 754

"There are not only the spirits, ghosts and demons themselves, but there are also their servants in human shape, there are sorceresses and there are witches, and these last can, and do, change themselves into tapeworms, gnawing at your guts until you die, so the moment that you must know that you have a witch-tapeworm inside you, you must send for the wise man, who will pinch and prick you until the bewitched tapeworm crawls out in fear. There are also what are known as hereditary or innocent witches, poor women who have not acquired but have only inherited their dread arts; such innocents can be cured, it seems, and are more to be pitied than reviled.

But there was no quarter shown to wizards. If a man was marked as a wizard he must emigrate or be slain. And we may take it that in a rather 'primitive' and static and isolated community, a 'wizard' was often no more than a queer fellow who thought for himself and did not like the way of life of the majority, had different tastes in meat and drink, did not care for sports, dances and festivals, possibly was sexually aberrant, in fact the sort of scoundrel who must be suppressed if society is to be kept decent and reasonably conservative. In some communities such deviant members are more lucky and are straightway hailed as shamans or medicine-men. But the Laotians just did not like wizards at all. Before the French got to interfering with good old customs, there was an ordeal for wizards and their accusers. Two pots of boiling coconut oil were set up. Into one pot went the sorcerer and into the other his denouncer. Whoever got out of his pot first was cracked over the head and disposed of.

So, underneath all the easy-going, good nature of the Laotians lie, when the conventions are outraged, some definite reactions of a rather violent kind. One wonders what has happened to these reactions now that they cannot be released in a right and proper and traditional way. For, if we can say that the Laotians have little or no religion, in the sense of a way of life or a moral discipline, they are filled and informed with beliefs."

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Moi AM9
M'nong

and we were down to the nursing-mothers, who, removing their babies from the breast and passing them to onlookers, tripped lightly towards us. Although the rice-alcohol, with its queer burnt-cereal taste, was weaker than usual, my friends said, it was beginning to take effect. The Moïs had slipped into an easy-going joviality and the nursing-mothers received some mild familiarities, for which they exchanged good-natured slaps. Their capacity for alcohol, though, was greater than that of the elder ladies, and they were not to be deceived by a mere pretence of drinking on our part. Calling for beakers they sucked up the alcohol, spat libations, syphoned off liquor until the beakers were filled, and presented them to us. Taking stock of the situation we saw that we had drunk our way to within two nursing-mothers of those perfect young representatives of the Polynesian race, the chief's daughters, who flung us occasional glances from between sweeping lashes. But we were all flagging, dizzy with the alcohol and the stunning reverberation of the gongs. And the morning was wearing on. It would have been difficult to imagine our condition by the time we had drunk our way down to an interesting social level. The Moïs encouraged us with smiles and gestures, but we could do no more.

273 574 [832]

It was at a village in the vicinity of Buon Dieo, where two years previously an extraordinary affair had taken place. A family of eight persons were suspected of magic practices to the detriment of the village. According to local custom a representative was chosen as accuser and a trial by ordeal arranged. This consisted of the villagers' champion and the head of the accused family plunging their heads under water, the first to withdraw his head, in this case the accused, being held to have lost the day. According to the rulings of customary law governing this rather unusual case the charged persons were found to be possessed by certain minor demons, located in each case in a bodily organ. The general attitude thus was a sympathetic one. The prisoners were regarded

683 695 754 755 776 787

776 "The Laotians also believe that there are people who are possessed
771 by the demon or who have [151] the evil eye. They call them 'Phi-
791 pop.' When a person or family in a village is so regarded by the other inhabitants, they are forced to move and to go and live in one of the villages composed exclusively of Phi-pop" (1).

(1) Le Laos français, op. cit. [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

The boatmen and folk who dwell along the watercourses also believe in the existence of certain particular beings, as for example the Siren or "Nguoc." The siren, whom some people claim to have seen (?), is said to have the form of a snake with paws and an enormous head surmounted by a red, saw-toothed crest. It is supposed to have seven nostrils in a single nose, and a mouth provided with several rows of teeth. The scales which cover it and the lobes of its tail are said to be able to clash against one another and make a great deal of noise.

791 In times of public calamity, the "Tho-Nguoc" assumes a human voice and announces important events or cataclysms to come.

•754 The "Phi-pop," to whom we have referred above, have, according
683 to popular belief, the power of casting spells and causing the death of animals and even persons by means of their incantations, their practices or their glance. The natives say that they can reduce a buffalo hide to the size of a grain of rice and thus make a person swallow it. Once in the stomach the hide is supposed to regain its natural volume and cause the death of the person who has swallowed it by making the stomach burst after intolerable suffering. It goes without saying that the "Phi-pop" who is the cause of the evil can, in return for certain gifts, arrest the suffering and deliver the patient before death overtakes him. A person who believes he has swallowed a buffalo hide falls prey to a kind of madness and commits all sorts of extravagances, to such a point that his neighbors try to get him out of the village and get rid of him, for he has become a "Phi-pop" in his turn. People claim that there is only one way to find out if a man is possessed, and that is to throw him into the water with his feet and hands tied. If he floats he is not possessed, but if [152] the opposite proves to be the case--and this is what invariably happens--then a "Phi-pop" is really present and his disappearance is regarded as a blessing.

776 of one or several spirits who are reincarnated in one possessed. This
796 person enables the villagers and those living in the same quarter to
787 know the course of the new year and, if necessary, to improve it by means of gifts and prayers. During this time the village is forbidden to strangers (Lévy).

776 A series of particularly dangerous phi is also known; these are
775 the Phi Phetu (Sk: Preta), that is the wandering souls of people who have died in an abnormal way, by accident, suicide, childbirth for a woman, etc. These souls cannot be born again. They remain present in order to torment human beings. The Phi Houa Kout are
776 the headless phi, the Phi Khon Long are those who carry the coffins,
• 754 the Phi Pop have the power of entering into the body of a living human being. The unfortunate person then has the evil eye and is expelled from the village. In the region of Savannakhet, there is a village of victims of the Phi Pop which was created by a Protestant mission, in order to rescue these poor creatures who would otherwise die of hunger, for they are forbidden to enter any village.

The Phi Phong are the spirits of human beings who have studied the formulas to acquire magic powers but have not conformed strictly to certain rites prescribed by their studies. They are bloodthirsty and go out at night by the light of the fire [32] which issues from their nostrils along the banks of rivers and streams, and of ponds, to catch fish and toads. If one meets a Phi Phong, one must flee for he can spit in one's face, and then one may become a Phi Phong oneself.

776 The Phi Kong Koi lives in the mountains and has the shape of a monkey. During his existence on earth he was the servant of a Vietnamese. One day, having been too badly treated, he decided to escape. But in order not to be caught, he camouflaged his footprints by putting his heels in front and his toes behind. The Vietnamese, deceived by this trick, went off in the opposite direction
[198] and never found him. In our days when the Laotians want to chase away the Phi Kong Koi, the speak Vietnamese to each other. But if one is traveling in the mountains, one must refrain from lighting a fire or cooking any fish or meat or crabs, for the odor attracts the phi who wants to come and eat. His victim would have his intestines split open. The approach of the phi is always preceded by a violent storm and a torrential rain. There are said to be a great many Phi King Koi in the region of Samneua.

There is, however, another kind of Phi. This one seems to have a particular hatred for archaeologists. These are the phis who inhabit sculptures or the tumuli which are found in the bush [en brousse]. But that is another story...